

AN ANALYSIS OF PIETY

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FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, piety has been esteemed as one of the more precious ideals of human character. At all times, and in all places, men have striven to acquire piety, and no effort or sacrifice has seemed too costly to this end. Was this merely an illusion on their part, a flight of the imagination? No! It was a real virtue—something solid, clearly to be seen, and of real power. Thus, as a specific fact of existence met with in life, it is something which indisputably deserves examination. That it is commonly neglected or overlooked by scientific research is due partly to the methodological difficulties involved in an approach to such a subject, but more fundamentally to the fact that it has theological connections which are somewhat repellent to the modern mind. To some, piety suggests escape from normal life, an abandonment of the world, seclusion, a denial of cultural interests, and is associated with an old-fashioned, clerical, unctuous pattern of behavior. To others, the word suggests prudishness, if not hypocrisy and fanaticism, or seems symptomatic of an attitude towards life which is unhealthy and, indeed, absurd. In the interests of mental health and spiritual freedom, they feel that such an attitude to life as that of piety is to be rejected.

Yet the pious man is still with us. He has not vanished from the earth, and, indeed more frequently than is generally realized, situations in normal life are to be encountered which are full of the evidence of pious devotion. The presence of piety amongst us is thus an incontestable fact, so why should prejudice deter us from investigating this phenomenon and, at least, endeavoring to understand it?

To begin with, we may ask—what is piety? Is it some psychical disposition or quality of the spirit? Is it a state of mind? or an attitude? or a praxis? What are its essential features? What is its meaning and value? What is its significance? What are its aspirations? Is it a unique phenomenon, or is it an accidental circumstance concomitant with other events of human life? What is the inner life of a pious man like? What are the underlying concepts, and what are the apprehensions that are realized in acts of piety?

We are not here discussing that implicit faith which is involved in

general systems of faith and worship but is not acquired independently by individuals, nor is it our intention to scrutinize critically any doctrine or creed. Our purpose, rather, is to analyze the pious man, and to examine, not his position with regard to any specific form of institutionalized religion, but his attitudes towards the elemental forces of reality. What does God mean in his life? What is his attitude towards the world, towards life, towards his inner forces as well as towards his possessions?

Piety is not a psychological concept. The word belongs as little to psychological nomenclature as do the logical concepts of true and false, the ethical concepts of right and wrong, or the aesthetic concepts of beautiful and ugly. Piety does not denote a function, but an ideal, of the soul. Like wisdom or truthfulness, it is something attainable, and is subject to the individual character of a man, being colored by his qualities. Thus there is a passionate as well as a sober type of piety, an active as well as a quietistic type, an emotional as well as an intellectual one. Yet, in spite of the fact that it is never independent of the psychical structure of the individual, it is futile to attempt to explain piety by any bent or bias of the mental life. It is far from being the result of any psychical dispositions or organic functions. Certain dispositions may influence or intensify it, but they do not create it.

As an actuality, it belongs to the stream of the psychical life, but its content, its spiritual aspect, is as independent of the psychical chain of causation as the acceptance of the Pythagorean theorem is independent of the individual temper. Ideas are not to be confused with the psychical setting in which they appear. It is fallacious to identify knowledge with the processes of its acquisition or realization. The spiritual content is not identical with the act itself, nor are concepts tantamount to functions of the mind. The spiritual objective content is universal, and should be distinguished from the subjective psychical function. Piety is an objective spiritual entity. There have been times in which piety was as common as knowledge of the multiplication table is today.

Our objective in this paper is an analysis of the consciousness that accompanies the acts of a pious man, and a classification of the concepts latent in his mind. There is hardly need for us to emphasize

the fact that the validity of such an analysis is not impaired by the possibility that the concepts derived from a general inquiry may not be found present in every act or example of piety. The fact that a poet proves to be unacquainted with the rules that govern his art, or does not apply them in every poem, does not mean that there are no rules of poetry.

We are not here concerned primarily with the psychological aspects of the question. These have their own importance, but would require a special investigation. Our purpose is to direct our attention to those essential, constitutive elements that are common to different types of piety, disregarding accidental colorings and the unimportant accompanying circumstances which may differ in different cases. Our task will be to describe piety as it is, without claiming to explain it, or to suggest its derivation from other phenomena. We shall not analyze psychologically the course it runs, or its peculiarities as they appear in the life of an individual. We shall not attempt to trace historically its development through the ages and in the matrix of different civilizations, but shall, rather, try to expound its spiritual content, and set forth its concepts and its manifestations in relation to the main realities of common life.

To label piety as an ability, a potential quality of the soul, would be like defining architecture as a skill. It is impossible to understand facts by mere speculation as to their origins. We should likewise go astray did we label it as a mood, an emotional state, a flutter of romantic feeling. To do this would be like characterizing the light of the moon as melancholy, or judging navigation by its danger to human life. Again, to call it a moral or intellectual virtue would be like trying to nail down the shadow of an escaping horse, and so securing neither horse nor shadow. Piety does not consist in isolated acts, in sporadic, ephemeral experiences, nor is it limited to a single stratum of the soul. Although it manifests itself in particular acts, it is beyond the distinctions between intellect and emotion, will and action. Its source seems to lie deeper than the reach of reason and to range wider than consciousness. While it reveals itself in single attitudes such as devotion, reverence, or the desire to serve, its essential forces lie in a stratum of the soul far deeper than the orbit of any of these. It is something unremitting, persistent, unchanging in the soul, a perpetual inner atti-

tude of the whole man. Like a breeze in the atmosphere, it runs as a drift through all the deeds, utterances and thoughts; it is a tenor of life betraying itself in each trait of character, each mode of action.

Piety points to something beyond itself. As it works in the inner life, it is ever referring us to something that transcends man, something that goes beyond the present instant, something that surmounts what is visible and available. Steadily preventing man from immersing himself in sensation or ambition, it stands staunchly as the champion of something more important than interest and desires, than passion or career. While not denying the beauty and grandeur of the world, the pious man realizes that life takes place under wide horizons, horizons that range beyond the span of an individual life or even the life of a nation, of a generation or even of an era. His sight perceives something indicative of the divine. In the small things he senses the significant, in the common and the simple he senses the ultimate; in the rush of the passing he feels the stillness of the eternal. While piety stands in relation to what man knows and feels about the horizons of life, it exceeds by far the sum total reached by adding up his diverse intellectual and emotional experiences. Its essence, in fact, stands for something more than a theory, a sentiment, or a conviction. To those who adhere to it, piety is compliance with destiny, the only life worth living, the only course of life that does not eventually throw man into bestial chaos.

Piety is thus a mode of living. It is the orientation of human inwardness toward the holy. It is a predominant interest in the ultimate value of all acts and feelings and thoughts. With his heart open to and attracted by some spiritual gravitation, the pious man moves, as it were, toward the center of a universal stillness, and his conscience is so placed as to listen to the voice of God.

Every man's life is dominated by certain interests, and is essentially determined by the aspiration for those things which matter to him to a greater or a lesser degree. The pious man's main interest is concern for the will of God, which thus becomes the driving force controlling the course of his actions and decisions, molding his aspirations and behavior. It is fallacious to see in isolated acts of perception or consideration the decisive elements in human behavior. Actually, it is the direction of mind and heart, the general interest of a person, that leads him to see or discover certain situations and to overlook others.

Interest is a selective apprehension based on prior ideas, preceding insights, recognitions or predilections. The interest of a pious man is determined by his faith, so that piety is faith translated into life, spirit embodied in a personality.

Piety is the direct opposite to selfishness. Living as he does in the vision of the unutterably pure, the pious man turns his back on his own human vanity, and his longing is to surrender the forces of egoism to the might of God. He is aware of both the shabbiness of human life and the meagerness and insufficiency of human service, and so, to protect the inner wholesomeness and purity of devotion from being defiled by interference from the petty self, he strives toward self-exclusion, self-forgetfulness, and an inner anonymity of service. He desires to be unconscious that it is he who is consecrating himself to the service of God. The pious man lays no claim to reward. He hates show, or being conspicuous in any way, and is shy of displaying his qualities even to his own mind. He is engrossed in the beauty of that which he worships, and dedicates himself to ends the greatness of which exceeds his capacity for adoration.

Piety is not a habit, something running along in a familiar groove. It is rather an impulse, a spurt, a stirring of the self. Apart from a certain ardor, zeal, intentness, vigor, or exertion, it becomes a stunted thing. No one who has even been once impelled by its force will ever entirely shake off its pursuing drive. In moments of stress the pious man may stumble, he may blunder or go astray, he may at moments succumb in his weakness to the agreeable instead of holding to the true, follow the ostentatious instead of the simple and hard, but his adherence to the holy will only slacken, it will never break away. Such lapses, indeed, are often followed by a new sweep towards the goal, the lapse providing new momentum.

Although piety implies a certain spiritual profundity, it is not an outgrowth of innate intelligence. Its forces spring from purity of heart rather than from acumen of mind. To be pious does not necessarily mean to be sagacious or judicious. It does, however, as a prevailing trend show features that are peculiar to wisdom, in the ancient sense of that word. Both piety and wisdom involve self-command, self-conquest, self-denial, strength of will, and firmness of purpose. But though these qualities are instrumental in the pursuit of piety, they are not its nature. It is the regard for the transcendent, the devotion

to God, that constitute its essence. To the pious man, as to the wise one, mastery over self is a necessity of life. However, unlike the wise man, the pious man feels that he himself is not the autonomous master, but is rather a mediator who administers his life in the name of God.

Piety and faith are not one and the same thing. They have differences from each other and are not necessarily concurrent. There can be faith without piety, just as there can be piety without faith. Unlike faith, piety not only accepts the mystery but attempts to match it in human endeavor, venturing to lift the human to the level of the spiritual. This should not be called an experience, but the acting upon experience, not a concern about meaning and its exploration, but an attempt to make life balance with an accepted meaning. In other words, it is neither a search nor a quest, neither a discovery of new truth nor a new viewpoint, nor is it some new insight into latent forces or possibilities.

The pious man is alive to what is solemn in the simple, to what is sublime in the sensuous, but he is not aiming to penetrate into the sacred. Rather he is striving to be himself penetrated and actuated by the sacred, eager to yield to its force, to identify himself with every trend in the world which is towards the divine. To piety it is not the outlook that carries weight, but the impression, not the notion but the sentiment, not acquaintance but appreciation, not knowledge but veracity. Piety is not a thinking about coming, but a real approach. It is not identical with the performance of rites and ceremonies, but is rather the care and affection put into their performance, the personal touch therein, the offering of life. Piety is the realization and verification of the transcendent in human life.

Faith is a way of thinking, and thus a matter of the mind; piety is a matter of life. Faith is a sense for the reality of the transcendent; piety is the taking of an adequate attitude toward it. Faith is vision, knowledge, belief; piety is relation, adjustment, an answer to a call, a mode of life. Faith belongs to the objective realm; piety stands entirely within the subjective and originates in human initiative. Piety is usually preceded by faith, and it is then faith's achievement, an effort to put faith's ideas into effect, to follow its suggestions. It desires not merely to learn faith's truth, but to agree with it; not merely to meet God, but to abide by Him, agree with His will, echo His words, and respond to His voice.

It is through piety that there comes the real revelation of the self, the disclosure of what is most delicate in the human soul, the unfolding of the purest elements in the human venture. Essentially it is an attitude toward God and the world, toward men and things, toward life and destiny, and in what follows we shall make an attempt to outline a few examples of this.

The pious man is possessed by his awareness of the presence and nearness of God. Everywhere and at all times he lives as in His sight, whether he remains always heedful of His proximity or not. He feels embraced by God's mercy as by a vast encircling space. Awareness of God is as close to him as the throbbing of his own heart, often deep and calm, but at times overwhelming, intoxicating, setting the soul afire. The momentous reality of God stands there as peace, power, and endless tranquillity, as an inexhaustible source of help, as boundless compassion, as an open gate awaiting prayer. It sometimes happens that the life of a pious man becomes so involved in God that his heart overflows as though it were a cup in the hand of God. This presence of God is not like the proximity of a mountain or the vicinity of an ocean, the view of which one may relinquish by closing the eyes or removing from the place. Rather is this convergence with God unavoidable, inescapable; like air in space it is always being breathed in, even though one is not all the time aware of continuous respiration.

To dwell upon those things that are stepping-stones on the path to the Holy, to be preoccupied with the great and wondrous vision of His presence, does not necessarily mean an avoidance of the common ways of life, or involve losing sight of worldly beauty or profane values. Piety's love of the Creator does not exclude love of the creation, but it does involve a specific approach to all values. Between man and world stands God. He is before all things, and all values are looked at through Him. Mere splendor of appearance does not appeal to the man of piety. He is fond of what is good in the eyes of God, and holds as valuable that which stands in accord with His peace. He is not deceived by the specious nor dissuaded by the unseemly. Shining garments, a smiling countenance, or miracles of art do not enchant him when they cover vice or blasphemy. The most magnificent edifices, most beautiful temples, and monuments of worldly glory are repulsive to him when they are built by the sweat and tears of suffering slaves, or erected through injustice and fraud. Hypocrisy and pretence

of devoutness are more distasteful to him than open iniquity. But in the roughened, dirty hands of devoted parents, or in the maimed bodies and bruised faces of those who have been persecuted but have kept faith with God, he may detect the last great light on earth.

Whatever the pious man does is linked to the Divine; each smallest trifle is tangential to His course. In breathing he uses His force; in thinking he wields His power. He moves always under the unseen canopy of remembrance, and the wonderful weight of the name of God rests steadily on his mind. The word of God is as vital to him as air or food. He is never alone, never companionless, for God is within reach of his heart. Under affliction or some sudden shock he may feel temporarily as though he were on a desolate path, but a slight turn of his eyes is sufficient for him to discover that his grief is outflanked by the compassion of God. The pious man needs no miraculous communication to make him aware of God's presence, nor is a crisis necessary to awaken him to the meaning and appeal of that presence. His awareness may momentarily be overlaid or concealed by some violent shift in consciousness, but it never fades away. It is this awareness of ever living under the watchful eye of God that leads the pious man to see hints of God in the varied things he encounters in his daily walk, so that many a simple event can be accepted by him both for what it is and also as a gentle hint or kindly reminder of things divine. In this mindfulness he eats and drinks, works and plays, talks and thinks, for piety is a life compatible with God's presence.

This compatibility reveals itself in the way in which he regards and evaluates all phenomena. Man is by nature inclined to evaluate things and events according to the purpose they serve. In the economic life a man is estimated according to his efficiency, by his worth in labor and by his social standing. Here every object in the universe is regarded as a commodity or a tool, its value being determined by the amount of work it can perform or the degree of pleasantness it can confer, so that utilization is the measure of all things. But was the universe created merely for the use of man, for the satisfaction of his animal desires? Surely it is obvious how crude and, indeed, thoughtless it is to subject other beings to the service of our interests, seeing that every existence has its own inner value, and to utilize such without regard to their individual essence is to desecrate them and despise their real dignity. The folly of this instrumental approach is manifest in

the vengeance which inevitably follows. In treating everything else as an instrument, man eventually makes himself the instrument of something he does not understand. By enslaving others, he plunges himself into serfdom, serving war-lords or those prejudices which come to be imposed upon him. Often, indeed, he wastes his life in serving passions which others shrewdly excite in him, fondly believing that this is his indulgence of his freedom.

The inner value of any entity—men or women, trees or stars, ideas or things—is, as a matter of fact, not entirely subject to any purposes of ours. They have a value in themselves quite apart from any function which makes them useful to our purposes. This is particularly true of man, for it is his essence, that secret of his being in which both existence and meaning are rooted, that commands our respect, so that even though we knew no way in which he might be useful, or no means of subordinating him to any end or purpose, we should esteem him for that alone.

Further, piety is an attitude toward reality in its entirety. It is alert to the dignity of every human being, and to those bearings upon the spiritual value which even inanimate things inalienably possess. The pious man, being able to sense the relations of things to transcendent values, will be incapable of disparaging any of them by enslaving them to his own service. The secret of every being is in the divine care and concern that are invested in it. In every event there is something sacred at stake, and it is for this reason that the approach of the pious man to reality is in reverence. This explains his solemnity and his conscientiousness in dealing with things both great and small.

Reverence is a specific attitude toward something that is precious and valuable, toward someone who is superior. It is a salute of the soul; an awareness of value without enjoyment of that value, or seeking any personal advantage from it. There is a unique kind of transparency about things and events. The world is seen through, and no veil can conceal God completely. So the pious man is ever alert to see behind the appearance of things a trace of the divine, and thus his attitude towards life is one of expectant reverence.

Because of this attitude of reverence the pious man is at peace with life, in spite of its conflicts. He patiently acquiesces in life's vicissitudes, because he glimpses spiritually their potential meaning. Every experience opens the door into a temple of new light, although the vestibule

may be dark and dismal. The pious man accepts life's ordeals and its meed of anguish, because he recognizes these as belonging to the totality of life. This does not mean complacency or fatalistic resignation. He is not insensitive. On the contrary he is keenly sensitive to pain and suffering, to adversity and evil in his own life and in that of others, but he has the inner strength to rise above grief, and with his understanding of what these sorrows really are, grief seems to him a sort of arrogance. We never know the ultimate meaning of things, and so a sharp distinction between what we deem good or bad in experience is unfair. It is a greater thing to love than to grieve, and, with love's awareness of the far-reachingness of all that affects our lives, the pious man will never overestimate the seeming weight of momentary happenings.

The natural man feels a genuine joy at receiving a gift, in obtaining something he has not earned. The pious man knows that nothing he has has been earned, not even his perceptions, his thoughts and words, or even his life, are his by desert. He knows that he has no claim to anything with which he is endowed. Knowing, therefore, that he merits little, he never arrogates anything to himself. His thankfulness being stronger than his wants and desires, he can live in joy and with a quiet spirit. Being conscious of the evidences of God's blessing in nature and in history, he pays tribute to the values of that blessing in all that he receives. The natural man has two attitudes to life, joy and gloom. The pious man has but one, for to him gloom represents an overbearing and presumptuous depreciation of underlying realities. Gloom implies that man thinks he has a right to a better, more pleasing world. Gloom is a refusal, not an offer, a snub not an appreciation, a retreat instead of a pursuit. Gloom's roots are in pretentiousness, fastidiousness, and a disregard of the good. The gloomy man, living in irritation and a constant quarrel with his destiny, senses hostility everywhere, and seems never to be aware of the illegitimacy of his own complaints. He has a fine sense for the incongruities of life, but stubbornly refuses to recognize the delicate grace of existence.

The pious man does not take life for granted. The weighty business of living does not cloud for him the miracle that we live through God. No routine of social or economic life dulls his mindfulness of this—the ineffably wonderful in nature and history. History to him is a perpetual improvisation by the Creator, which is being continually

and violently interfered with by man, and his heart is fixed on this great Mystery that is being played by God and man. Thus his main asset is not some singular experience, but life itself. Any exceptional experience serves only as a keyhole for the key of his belief. He does not depend on the exceptional, for to him common deeds are adventures in the domain of the spiritual, and all his normal thoughts are, as it were, sensations of the Holy. He feels the hidden warmth of good in all things, and finds hints of God cropping up in almost every ordinary thing on which he gazes. It is for this reason that his words bring hope into a sordid and despairing world.

The scope of that in which the pious man feels himself involved is not a single realm, as, for instance, that of ethical acts, but covers the whole of life. Life to him is a liability, and a liability from which he can never be free. No evasion on his part can escape it, and no sphere of action, no period of life, can be withdrawn from it. So piety cannot consist only in specific acts, such as prayer or ritual observances, but is something bound up with all actions, concomitant with all doings, accompanying and shaping all life's activities. Man's responsibility to God is not an excursion into spirituality, an episode of spiritual rhapsody, but the scaffold on which he stands as daily he goes on building life. His every deed, every incident of mind takes place on this stage, so that unremittingly man is at work either building up or tearing down his life, his home, his hope of God.

Responsibility implies freedom, and man who is in bondage to environment, to social ties, to inner disposition, may yet enjoy freedom before God. Only before God is man truly independent and truly free. But freedom in its turn implies responsibility, and man is responsible for the way in which he utilizes nature. It is amazing how thoughtless modern man is of his responsibility in relation to his world. He finds before him a world crammed to overflowing with wonderful materials and forces, and without hesitation or scruple he grasps at whatever is within his range. Omnivorous in his desire, unrestrained in his efforts, tenacious in his purpose, he is gradually changing the face of the earth, and there seems to be none to deny him or challenge his mastery. Deluded by this easy mastery, we give no thought to the question of what basis there is to our assumed right to possess our universe. Our own wayward desires and impulses, however natural they may be, are no title to ownership. Unmindful of this we take

our title for granted and grasp at everything, never questioning whether this may be robbery. Power-house, factory, and department-store make us familiar with the exploitation of nature for our benefit. And lured by familiarity, the invisible trap for the mind, we easily yield to the illusion that these things are rightfully at our disposal, thinking little of the sun, the rainfall, the water-courses, as sources by no means rightfully ours. It is only when we suddenly come up against things obviously beyond the scope of human domination or jurisdiction, such as mountains or oceans, or uncontrollable events like sudden death, earthquake, or other catastrophes, which clearly indicate that man is neither lord of the universe nor master of his own destiny, that we are somewhat shaken out of our illusions.

In reality man has not unlimited powers over the earth, as he has not over stars or winds. He has not even complete power over himself. In the absolute sense, neither the world nor his own life belong to him. And of the things he does more or less control, he controls not the essence, but only the appearance, as is evident to anyone who has ever looked with unclouded vision in the face even of a flower or a stone. The question then is—who is the lord? Who owns all that exists? The universe is not a waif, nor is life a derelict, abandoned and unclaimed. All things belong to God. So the pious man regards the forces of nature, the thoughts of his own mind, life and destiny, as the property of God. This governs his attitude toward all things. He does not grumble when calamities befall him, or lapse into despair, for he knows that all in life is a concern of the divine because all is in the divine possession.

Thus the pious man realizes, also, that whatever he may have at his disposal has been bestowed upon him as a gift. And there is a difference between a possession and a gift. Possession is loneliness. The very word excludes others from the use of the possessed object without the consent of the possessor, and those who insist on possession, ultimately perish in self-excommunication and loneliness. On the contrary, in receiving a gift the recipient obtains, besides the present, the love of the giver. A gift is thus the vessel that contains the affection, which is destroyed as soon as one begins to look on it as a possession. The pious man avers that he has a perpetual gift from God, for in all that comes to him he feels the love of God. In all the thousand and one

experiences that make up a day, he is conscious of that love intervening in his life.

The ordinary man is inclined to disregard all indications in life of the presence of the divine. In his conceit and vainglory he thinks of himself as the possessor. But this is sacrilege to the pious man, and his method of saving himself from such hallucinations is by asceticism and sacrifice. He rids himself of all sense of being a possessor by giving up for God's sake things that are desired or valued, and depriving himself of those things that are precious to him for the sake of others who need his help. Thus, to sacrifice is not to abandon what has been granted to us, to throw away the gifts of life. It is, on the contrary, giving back to God what we have received from Him by employing it in His service in the cause of good. Such giving is a form of thanksgiving.

Both self-dispossession and offering are essential elements of sacrifice. Mere offering without self-dispossession would be without personal participation and would easily lapse into a superficial ritual act in which the mechanical aspect is more important than the personal. It would result in externalization and perfunctoriness of sacrifice, as has so often happened in religious history. On the other hand, self-dispossession alone tends to make asceticism an end in itself, and when turned into an end in itself it loses its bearing upon God. True asceticism is not merely depriving ourselves, but is giving to God what was precious to us.

Poverty has often been an ideal for pious men, but one may be poor in material goods while yet clinging the more tenaciously to one's ambitions and intellectual goods. Mere poverty in itself is not a good, for the bitterness of poverty often upsets the balance of values in human character, while the delight of the righteous in the gifts of God affords him strength in service and the means to give. Purpose of sacrifice does not lie in pauperization as such, but in the yielding of all aspirations to God, thus creating space for Him in the heart. Moreover it is an *imitatio Dei*, for it is done after the manner of the divine Giver, and reminds man that he is created in the divine image, and is thus related to God.

This, however, presents another problem. How are we to understand this kinship of man with the divine? One indication of man's

affinity with God is his persistent aspiration to go beyond himself. He has an ability to devote himself to a higher aim, the potentiality of a will to serve, to dedicate himself to a task which goes beyond his own interests and his own life, to live for an ideal. This ideal may be the family, a friend, a group, the nation, or it may be art, science, or social service. In many persons this will to serve is kept under, but in the pious man it blooms and flourishes. In many lives these ideals seem blind alleys, but in the pious man they are thoroughfares to God. If these ideals become idols, ends in themselves, they close in the soul, but to the pious man they are openings letting in the light from far places to illumine many a small particular thing. To him ideals are strides on the way, but they are never the destination.

Piety, finally, is allegiance to the will of God. Whether that will is understood or not, it is accepted as good and holy, and is obeyed in faith. Life is a mandate, not the enjoyment of an annuity, a task, not a game, a command, not a favor. So to the pious man, life never appears as a fatal chain of events following necessarily one on another, but comes as a voice with an appeal. It is a flow of opportunity for service, every experience giving the cue to a new duty, so that all that enters life is for him a means of devotion. Piety is, thus, not an excess of enthusiasm, but implies a resolve to follow a definite course of life in pursuit of the will of God. All the pious man's thoughts and plans revolve around this concern, and nothing can distract him or turn him from the way. Whoever sets out on this way soon learns how imperious is the spirit. He senses the compulsion to serve, and though at times he may attempt to escape, the strength of this compulsion will bring him back inevitably to the right way in search of the will of God. Before he acts he will pause to weigh the effects of his act in the scales of God. Before he speaks he will consider whether his words will be well-pleasing to Him. Thus in self-conquest and earnest endeavor, with sacrifice and single-mindedness, through prayer and grace, he proceeds on his way, and to him the way is more important than the goal. It is not his destiny to accomplish but to contribute, and his will to serve shapes his entire conduct. His preoccupation with the will of God is not limited to a section of his activities, but his great desire is to place his whole life at the disposal of God, and in this he finds the real meaning of life. He would feel wretched and lost without the certainty that his life, insignificant though it be, is of some purpose

in the great plan, and life takes on enhanced value when he feels himself engaged in fulfilling purposes which lead him away from himself. In this way he feels that in whatever he does he is ascending step by step a ladder leading to the ultimate. In aiding a creature, he is helping the Creator. In succoring the poor, he is taking care of something that concerns God. In admiring the good, he is revering the Spirit of God. In loving the pure, he is being drawn to Him. In promoting the right, he is directing things towards His will, in which all aims must terminate. Ascending by this ladder, the pious man reaches the state of self-forgetfulness, sacrificing not only his desires but also his will, for he realizes that it is the will of God that matters, and not his own perfection or salvation. Thus the glory of man's devotion to the good becomes a treasure of God on earth.

Yet it is not his desire to serve as a slave. Man's task is to reconcile liberty with service, reason with faith. This is the deepest wisdom man can attain. It is our destiny to serve, to surrender. We have to conquer in order to succumb; we have to acquire in order to give away, we have to triumph in order to be overwhelmed. Man has to understand in order to believe, to know in order to accept. The aspiration is to obtain; the perfection is to dispense. This is the meaning of death: the ultimate self-dedication to the divine. Death so understood will not be distorted by the craving for immortality, for this act of giving away is reciprocity on man's part for God's gift of life. For the pious man it is a privilege to die.